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# How I Spent My Summer Vacation

By Joshua Edward  
Whalesong Staff

The dilemmas of summer vacation: where to go, what to do; how to earn a few precious greenbacks to tide you through the lean times of the academic year...This year, why not consider doing something that combines all of the above in one whirlwind academic adventure? Imagine spending 10 weeks on the Arctic ocean, tracking ringed seals through the polar ice, or identifying stellar sea lions with photo-identification (the complete antithesis of a DMV desk job).

What if instead of grouching about how you had "nothing to do" all summer, you came back to school prepared to tell all your pals that you spent *your* summer vacation studying declining seal populations in Glacier Bay National Park?

The University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) is currently offering research assistant positions to



Photo courtesy of Cathy Connor  
Chris Coffeen, USGS hydrology student intern, samples water from Mendenhall River bottom off of Back Loop bridge.

undergraduate students interested in "the physiology, ecology, and behavior of marine organisms." The program, which will take place during the summer of 2003, offers UAS students a chance to participate in a genuine scientific research project, while also exploring some of the far reaches of Alaska. Did I mention it comes complete with

travel funds and a \$350-per-week stipend? That got your attention, didn't it?

Provided with funding by UAS and the National Science Foundation, eligible students will participate in research programs under the guidance of UAS

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# Grading inconsistencies frustrate students

By Philip Walzer  
The Virginian-Pilot( KRT)

One English instructor grades essays without a blueprint, looking mostly for the big ideas. Another employs a detailed checklist, including "sooth transitions" and "properly placed modifiers."

A university offers plus and minus grades, but one of its professors decides not to use them.

A 90 in one course can net a student a final grade of A. In another class at the same college, she would end up with an A-minus. In a third, a B-plus.

Across academia, the process of grading depends on the idiosyncrasies of the professor, with little oversight or regulation from the university.

That's as it should be, say a chorus of professors

# Ethnomusicologist visits campus, speaks about affirmative action

By Sean Smith  
Whalesong Staff

Ethnomusicologist and Senior Vice Provost of the University of Michigan, Dr. Lester Monts, defended the university's affirmative action policy in a lecture he gave on Friday Feb. 14 in the Lake Room. The West African scholar was brought to UAS as part of the celebration of Black History Month.

"The University of Michigan's admissions process is fundamentally flawed...and unconstitutional," President Bush stated on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in his address regarding the Supreme Court case against the University of Michigan about its affirmative action policy included in its admission of incoming students.

"We believe we are right, diversity is good for all," Monts said about the affirmative action policy that is included in the schools admission policy.

Dr Monts gave a presentation titled, *Diversity, A Compelling State Interest?* which focused on the pending lawsuit against his university for favoring affirmative action. The heart of the law suit is that the university is "unfairly" favoring the applicants of ethnicity and award

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Photo by Kevin Myers

Besides being a supporter of affirmative action, Dr. Lester Monts created the score for the film *Amistad*. He is pictured here (background) with his brother during their UAS visit.

and even some students.

"All classes can't be evaluated in the same manner," said Elsie M. Barnes, acting vice president for academic affairs at Norfolk State University. "How can you tell fine-arts people that you've got to use the same grading standard as people in criminal justice?"

Michael J. Smith, a University of Virginia professor of political thought and chairman of its Faculty Senate, said the variety provides good experience for students. "These kids are going to have a range of work environments to which they have to adjust," he said. "Some bosses will be easy; some bosses will be hard. I don't think it's appropriate to approach grading any differently."

But the lack of consistency bedevils some gradu-

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# EDITORIAL & OPINION

## The Whalesong

The student voice  
of UAS

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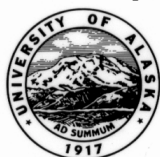
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The University of Alaska Southeast student newspaper, *The Whalesong*, is a free bi-monthly publication with a circulation of 1000 copies per issue. The Whalesong's primary audience includes students, faculty, staff, and community members.

*The Whalesong* will strive to inform and entertain its readers, analyze and provide commentary on the news, and serve as a public forum for the free exchange of ideas.

The staff of *The Whalesong* values freedom of expression and encourages reader response. *The Whalesong* editorial staff assumes no responsibility for the content of material. The views and opinions contained in this paper in no way represent the University of Alaska, and reflect only those of the author(s).

## Prostitutes in XTRA TUFs: Crime spree Juneau style

By Michael Johnson  
Whalesong Staff

Victim. That's what you'll be if more theft occurs at UAS. I am not talking about a nacho bandit in the cafeteria, or somebody who stole your brilliant idea in creative writing, none of those laughable misdemeanors. I am talking about the big kahuna, the full house, and any other strange phrases you can conjure up that express a heightening degree of dramatization ... that's right, UAS, tremble with me as we plummet into HELL... felonies, that is.

Maybe you UASers have already noticed a difference: gang wars in the cafeteria, cock fights in the pottery room, prostitutes in XTRA TUFs working the boardwalk outside the computer lab. Hell, the library's precious books are disappearing by the shelf-full- bazillions of books, to the point where they have to lock the downstairs library door to prevent theft. Right. I'm sorry to contradict such an infallible plan, ye library masterminds, but I think I may have found a slight hole in the whole of your security: perhaps an extra-cunning, Kaiser Sose class of crook could smuggle books *out* via the way he *enters*. Surely I am the only genius on campus who realizes that stealing involves smuggling items on your person, and requires abandonment of these rudimentary, low-level criminal techniques that the locked door denies.

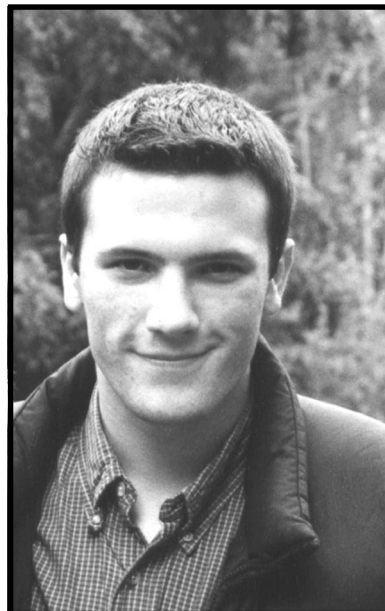
Crime is outta control here, right? After all, everyone knows about the laptop guy, right? You saw the fliers, right? That was David Noon's new Macintosh iBook that mysteriously disappeared from his office on the second day of class this semester, easily costing him what we view as a semester's worth of tuition. By the end of that first week, I began hearing the crunching of skulls echoing up the halls in the Egan extension. Didn't you?

Actually, I must admit that I am lying to you, faithful UASers; I merely heard a few random cannon blasts.

Actually, I am lying again. I didn't hear anything at all except that weird high-pitched BEEP! that persistently crones out of the classroom walls. But that's another issue. The point here is that *minimal* other illegalities have occurred on campus since the computer fiasco ...

... which, by the way; he got back. Yes, you read me right, he got the freakin' thing back! Only in Juneau, friends, only here. Said Noon of the incident, "The whole incident defies Juneau as being crime free, but on the other hand, any other place other than Juneau and I would've never seen it again." Noon, not renowned for his small-town insights, may be on to something.

I can't believe the idiot who stole the computer was so dumb that he dangerously hawked it downtown for \$200, when he could've *returned* it to Noon for \$500. I also can't believe a person this handicapped is difficult to apprehend.



But again, that's another issue.

Don't go unloading your bazookas just yet, UASers. There have been a few other isolated incidences of theft from media services; if you see anyone peddling mousepads by the gross don't hesitate to bust out a citizen's arrest. However, I am happy to report that there have been no reports of car break-ins this semester, no major acts of vandalism. Heck, there haven't been any perverted flashings. Where's the fun in that?

If you do witness or catch wind of a crime on UAS, Tish Griffin, our Judicial Officer, is the person to talk to. Her office is located right across from the bookstore, and she is more than happy to do everything in her power to see that justice is done. Thanks, Tish. Her helpful collaboration with the Juneau Police has helped to zero in on the probable computer culprit.

Juneau still is a wonderful place where the small-town feel permeates the air. Lock your doors, but rest assured that the cafeteria gangs have left for larger turf. UAS is a safe place where crime rates are insignificant. And that's exactly the way we like 'em.

Oh, one more thing: unlock that damn downstairs door and believe a little.

## Summer Vacation continued from page 1

Biology professors and other participating research scientists. The research programs, which begin in May and June, will begin with a workshop on the UAS campus that will include presentations on research methods and scientific methods and conduct, and field and laboratory safety.

Participating students will work closely with the research scientists involved in each individual project, and will present the project results at a seminar upon completion of the program. Some students may even have the opportunity to present their findings at national meetings, an invaluable resume point if there ever was one! If you're wondering how the heck one fills 10 weeks worth of time in the middle of the polar ice cap, rest easy: students will also be involved in weekly discussions and topic lectures.

Students applying for the program must be United States citizens or permanent residents, and currently enrolled as an undergraduate at an accredited academic institution. Unfortunately for those entering your last semester, graduating seniors are not eligible. Participating students should be interested in marine biology, and should have a strong academic record. Applications are due by February 28, 2003 for review during the first week of March. Applications received after February 28<sup>th</sup> will be considered for positions not filled during the initial review of the applicant pool. For more information on the program, or to download an application, please visit: <http://www.jun.alaska.edu/uas/biology/REU.html> or contact Elizabeth Matthews, M.S., Assistant Professor of Biology at UAS.

## Letters to the Editor

The Whalesong gladly accepts letters to the editor. Letters may not exceed 300 words, and may be edited for length, clarity, and grammar. Letters must be signed and include a means of contact for verification. Send your letters to 11120 Glacier Highway, Juneau, AK 99801, [whalesong@uas.alaska.edu](mailto:whalesong@uas.alaska.edu), by fax to (907) 465-6399, or bring them to Room 102, Mourant Bldg.

**Affirmative action continued from page 1**

schools to have an affirmative action policy, most other schools have gone to a percent system, not unlike the one UAS uses, in order to create diversity on campuses.

"The percent system does not work because not all the minority students are not enrolled in the same schools, so the top 10 percent is not always the elite students that we would normally enroll in our university," Monts said after an hour and a half of flipping through slides and answering questions from students and faculty in the Lake Room. "There are over 25,000 applicants and only 5,100 freshmen student enrolled each term."

The University of Michigan became an affirmative action school when it launched the Michigan Mandate in 1987 after seeing only 9 percent of their student were the minority. Now, 16 years later, the University of Michigan enjoys a higher minority population, 26 percent, and a higher minority graduating class in public school than the national average.

**Grading inconsistencies continued from page 1**

ates, who have to adjust to a new grading style with every faculty member.

"I'd like it to be a little more standardized," said Wayne Jarvis, a senior from Maryland at the College of William and Mary. "I'll be taking a course with one professor while you'll be taking the exact same course with another professor. . ."

"And I'll do half the work and get a better grade," his friend Ryan Kelly, a senior from Pennsylvania, finished the thought.

College catalogs and Web sites tend to offer little guidance on grading, other than numerical translations of letter grades. Old Dominion University's catalog prints one-word definitions of grades: A is "superior," C is "satisfactory," which is more than many colleges provide.

University officials say, however, that grading doesn't occur in a vacuum:

Professors usually provide a syllabus at the start of the semester clarifying how grades are determined.

Faculty members whose grades seem overly high or low are questioned by their chairmen or deans, though they aren't often required to change their habits.

Most universities provide an appeals process to challenge grades, though few students use it and an infinitesimal number win their appeals.

A few colleges, including Virginia Military Institute and Virginia State University, have universal grading scales: 90 and above automatically equates to an A; 80 to 89, a B.

Most schools leave that up to the professor. Their variations can be small, but significant.

At U Va, politics professor Larry J. Sabato uses a tough scale: 90 to 92 is a B-plus, 93 to 95 an A-minus and 96 and above an A.

Robert H. Holden, an associate professor of history at ODU, also demanded a 93 for an A-minus when he arrived at ODU. "I got clobbered by my peers," Holden said. Now he awards an A-minus for 90 to 92 and an A for 93 and above.

Some departments or colleges that have tried to standardize grading practices ended up with mixed results. A decade ago, NSU's history department adopted a uniform scale. A 95 or above earns an A, 90 to 94 an A-minus. Below 60: an F.

Among the faculty, "nobody has really challenged this," professor William H. Alexander said. "From the point of view of the student, they ought to be able to know an A with one teacher is similar to an A with another teacher"

Should it go university-wide? "It would be useful," he said, "but it would be a difficult battle to fight. Some people are used to certain scales."

Kenyon College, a liberal-arts school in Ohio, tried to coax professors toward uniformity with a "suggested" grade spread. In the '70s and '80s, its faculty handbook

published a "desirable" distribution, ranging from 20 percent A's to 2 percent F's.

The suggestion disappeared in 1990 "It didn't seem to have a lot of effect because there continued to be some grade inflation," Kenyon economics professor Bruce L. Gensemer said.

Virginia professors recoil at the idea of suggesting, let alone requiring, a set percentage of grades. "That would generate a lot of unfairness," said Robert B. Archibald, an economics professor at William and Mary.

Ability levels vary widely, even among sections of the same class. Archibald recalled two sections of intermediate macroeconomics he taught in the same semester: In one, nine of 20 students received A's. In the other, one of 35 did.

Several also cite "academic freedom" to resist intrusion into grading. "Grades are tied to your goals and objectives for a course," said Elaine M. Justice, an associate professor of psychology at ODU. "Only a faculty member can decide what they are. It's part of academic freedom."

But Valen Johnson, author of a forthcoming book on grade inflation and an advocate of more uniformity in grading, calls the argument a red herring.

"Academic freedom is something that's given to professors so they can profess their views without reprisal," said Johnson, a professor of biostatistics at the University of Michigan. "To characterize grading as a form of academic freedom is nonsense."

In a multiple-choice test or a math exam, grading might seem pretty cut and dried. But how

**Continued on page 5**

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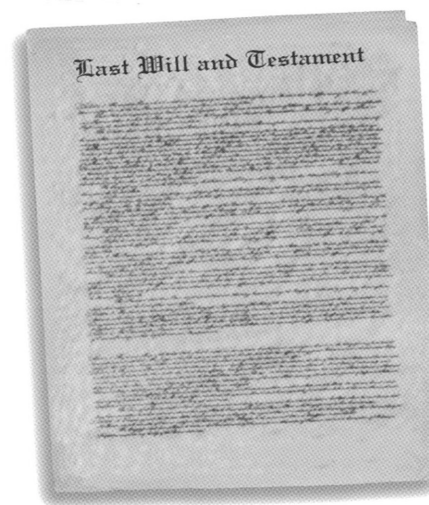
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# FEATURES

## What do northern lights, cannibals, and sunshine have in common? *The JUMP Society*

By Sarah Carter  
Whalesong Contributor

**H**ave you ever walked home from a show with sore stomach muscles, aching cheeks, and noticed your companion was acting rather strange with a fork in his hand? I have.

Late in January I left the Silverbow Backroom still giggling about the mating rituals of Xtra Tufts. I cried for a lost climbing teddy bear named Cindy. Then I began to wonder what my friend with the fork really meant when he said he wanted to have me for a late night dinner at his place.

I blame all of these erratic thoughts and emotions on the Juneau Underground Motion Picture Society. The films they organized to show at their Second Annual Winter Film Festival tugged at all of my emotions for days afterward. At work I burst out in inappropriate laughter thinking about the poor boy who was tricked into believing there was a psychotic killer on the loose. I found myself contemplating the real meaning of "Samurai Santas." I became so intrigued by the amazing footage of beavers; I searched on the web for unusual beaver behaviours and learned they really do sing folk songs while underwater. I can safely say the JUMP Society made my week, so I thought I'd share a little information I've learned about who they are and what they do.

The JUMP Society, founded by Patrick Race, Aaron Suring, and Gage Choat, was conceived under the northern lights while the three were students at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. They envisioned "an informal group of people from all walks of life who get together and showcase short films they've created." The JUMP Society now promotes filmmaking as an accessible art form by organizing local film festivals and importing other films to Juneau, such as selections from the Anchorage Film Festival.

Race, who was born and raised in Juneau, returned to Southeast Alaska after earning a degree in Computer Science. He saw a need for an organization like JUMP. "Juneau has a very tight knit and artistic community, we're trying to provide something fun, artsy, and maybe even educational for people to do on a cold, cloudy Saturday evening," he says.

With support from the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council and other donations the JUMP Society has organized four festivals in the last few years, including this winter's hour and half show with more than 20 locally made films. The films' content varied from fresh humor to suspenseful drama, Charlie's Angels action to surreal underwater diving, South Carolinian farmers to an investigation of cannibalism in Southeast Alaska. The audience oscillated between tears and rolling fits of laughter; that's how my stomach muscles became so sore.



Stop Watching.  
Start Creating.

My laughing muscles had barely recovered when the JUMP Society sponsored selections from the Second Annual Anchorage International Film Festival to be shown at the Perseverance Theatre. The first night a collection of seven films were shown, mostly heavy drama interspersed with a tiny bit of pantomime humour. The second evening, *The Slaughter Rule* was a feature-length film described as "a rich and complicated tale of compassion in a cold climate." Juneauites viewed the world from behind the cameras of some new and progressive international artists. Somehow though, as if we don't already have enough dreariness to deal with in Juneau, impending doom and destruction seemed to be the recurring theme. Race commented on the dour selection, "(In Juneau) we need at least a few short films that ooze sunshine to break things up. Its like those gray days we get, they aren't so bad as long as the sun pops out once in awhile."

Race is encouraged with the success of these recent JUMP Society events, "I think it's just going to get better. The films we're getting are better every time and more people are turning out to the shows." The next event is the JUMP Society Summer Film Festival is scheduled for July 12; entries will be taken through July 1. For local artists and budding filmmakers, Race suggests "judicious editing" and "ruthless efficiency" helps the production process. "Show your film to a few people and see what they like or don't like," he said.

For those of you with any inkling of creative juice, get behind a camera and go crazy! If cannibals can get inspired by the northern lights and oozing sunshine, you too, can find inspiration right here in Juneau. Don't let these reasons prevent you from submitting a film to the

JUMP Society. "Stop watching, start creating."

- You didn't have time
- Costumes were too expensive
- Your theme song sucked
- The super cool opening credits were never completed
- You couldn't get any monkey actors
- You had trouble securing filming locations
- You couldn't convince any cuties to be in the film
- Your actors couldn't handle constructive criticism
- Your actors were uncooperative
- The only good lines you could come up with were from other films
- Your special effects were lame
- Your space robots didn't work
- Your movie lost its focus
- Editing took way too long
- The dog ate your final cut (Gage Choat)

And my addition: the cannibals had you for dinner.

For more information about the JUMP society contact them at 586-3440  
[www.akfu.com/jump](http://www.akfu.com/jump)



Photos by Dave Klein

Above and to the right, UAS students participate in a different kind of Jump Society as the Polar Bear Plunge continues its long-standing tradition. On Feb. 8 students jump into the freezing waters of the Auke Bay harbor. It is one of the many events that take place every year as part of Winterfest. Other events included were Turkey Bowling, Valentine's and Bonfire Ice Cream Socials and the Banff Mountain Film Festival.

### Student and Community Submissions

Student and community submissions are both welcomed and encouraged at The Whalesong. Send them to 11120 Glacier Hgwy, Juneau, AK 99801, [jywhale@uas.alaska.edu](mailto:jywhale@uas.alaska.edu), by fax to (907) 465-6399, or bring them to Room 102, Maurant Bldg.



# Life in the Matrix

By Dixie Normus and Alotta Vogyna  
Whalesong Contributors

**Y**ou are never going to believe who I saw at Squire's last Wednesday! Conrad! Yes, he has not fallen off the face of the planet, hadn't been mauled by a bear nor had he been abducted and anal-probed by aliens. Thus, when he started sprouting his BS excuse about his ex-girlfriend coming into town for a week, and how she was ruining his life, and about how dramatic it was and that he didn't want to talk about it and, and... HOGWASH! I ordered a beer, not crap, so I just had to turn my face away because I thought I might hurl. It goes without saying that Conrad proceeded to ask me dumb questions all night like, "Is that your angry face?" and that he left without saying goodbye. Well, I was raised with manners so good riddance Conrad and I hope your psycho ex continues to ruins your life.

So remember my talk of being born into that goo-filled sac...it happened and I found myself in the part of the Matrix where all the men were born in the Petri dish versions of the gene pool, while the rest of the real world sprung forth from the Olympic size version. Take for example a certain love interest named Edward. Eddie and I played a little tonsil hockey and did some horizontal mambo,

even though he had a girley girl here in town. It was fun, he was very strong and very cute, until somewhere around the ghastly hour of 3:00 a.m. one night, Edward managed to slur out, "I want you to be my mistress!" This is the part of the article where the background song "Just be my Skanky Ho" by Sir Mix-a-lot comes to a screeching halt and everyone stops grinding and stares at you. I pretended not to hear what he said because obviously he was not talking to me, but to all the rumpled clothes on his bedroom floor, and I surely had not been transplanted back to the Victorian Age when I was supposed to shut my pie-hole and recognize the privilege of being the cute booty call. Eddie-poo has since ended the relationship with girley girl (how ironic that it happened to be while I was present, via the telephone) and has been very temperately confused. One day he will be all about, "Let's go out, let's do something *together*." Then the next minute I call him and he answers my questions very bluntly and then says, "Okay, guess I'll talk to you later. Bye." Click. The inviting sound of dial tone greets me from the other end. I don't know what to think so I just cry. Hot. Cold. Hot. Cold. Does anyone else see the trend here or am I the only one who realizes that Eddie is menopausal? In

**Continued on page 7**

## Grading inconsistencies continued from page 3

do professors judge essays?

It's not an exact science.

Jesse P. Bohl, an associate professor of philosophy at William and Mary, looks for students to "make sense of the stuff they have read and see how it connects with the previous material."

"A" paper does both of them excellently," Bohl said. "For a real 'A' paper, I'm looking for a way of putting the pieces together that surprises me. An A-minus is a small surprise. A B-plus has no surprises, but is pretty elegant. When you get down in the B range, you begin to see missed things."

And F's? "An 'F' paper shows no awareness of the class discussion," he said.

Louis A. Bloomfield, a U Va physics professor, teaches "How Things Work," a popular introductory class for non-science majors. Students must often make connections between everyday objects and actions and the physics behind them.

In A-worthy essays, "these people are doing physics the entire time," said Bloomfield, who gained international attention last year after using a computer program to detect dozens of instances of plagiarism. The B's "wax in and out of physics. 'C' papers just beat around the bush. They point at physics, but they don't tell you how to do it."

Curving is another aspect of grading that divides campuses.

Never, says Justice, the psychology professor. "If you want to find out what students have mastered and your test reflects that, you shouldn't have to curve grades," says W. Dean Harman, a U Va chemistry professor whose average test grade is about 60. His exam questions "require a significant amount of problem-solving skills" Harman said. "The expectation is that not every student will be able to answer every problem."

So how do professors curve? Again, no consensus.

Harman totals the final numbers and allots A's to roughly the highest 35 percent, B's to the next 30 percent and C's to the next 30 percent. He'll tilt higher for a particularly bright class or a bit lower for a slower class. "I allow myself a bit of freedom as to where I draw those cutoffs," Harman said.

Amin Dharamsi, a professor of electrical and computer engineer-

ing at ODU, does something similar for his electromagnetics class plots the final numbers in a dot chart, studies the clusters, sleeps on it, studies them again. The midpoint usually rests in the middle-C range. Dharamsi looks for "breaks" between the clusters, corresponding to cutoffs between grades. That doesn't always happen.

Last semester, a final number in the 60s turned into a B-minus; an 81 was an A-minus. "Sometimes it can be a judgment call," Dharamsi said.

Nancy L. Wade, an associate professor of biology at ODU, does it this way: If the highest grade on a test is 96, she adds 4 points to everyone's score.

"I'm guilty of grade inflation, too," said Wade, considered one of ODU's toughest graders. "I do it so that students know that their competition is not with my knowledge but with the knowledge of the individuals in the classroom."

But that philosophy troubles Ryan Ponton, a U Va pre-med junior from Virginia Beach. "It's not testing: Do you know the material?" Ponton said. "It's testing: Do you know more than the other person?"

Eli DeJarnette, a junior at U Va from Culpeper, also sees problems with curving. Sometimes, he said, professors curve downward, giving students an ugly surprise. In chemistry, "I ended up with a C-plus when I averaged an 84 on the tests."



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Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 4 -  
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## Alumni Profile: Bob Mitchell

By Emily Wescott  
Whalesong Contributor

Bob Mitchell knows the value of the classes offered at the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau, because they helped him get his Master's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks.

"I was able to complete my Master's degree at UAF by taking classes at UAS," Mitchell said. "One of those courses was in finance, and that course has come in handy when evaluating investment opportunities."

As an investment officer for the state of Alaska, Mitchell uses financial concepts he learned at UAS on a daily basis, such as time value of money, return on equity, return on capital, financial ratios and debt/total capital.

A North Pole High School graduate, Mitchell earned his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from UAF in 1990, and completed his Master's degree in 1998.

"Consider getting a Master's degree," Mitchell said. "I worked after I received my undergraduate degree and took night classes in the MBA program. I found that I benefited from this, because I was able to combine



Photo courtesy of Karn Cumminstor  
UASAA Treasurer Bob Mitchell and his daughter  
Jordan Randolph

theory from the classroom with real-world work experiences."

Mitchell said he has benefited from and thoroughly enjoyed his work as treasurer of the UAS Alumni Association board of directors.

Serving on the board of directors "has allowed me to familiarize myself with UAS's greatest resource: its people," Mitchell said. "That includes its faculty, staff, students and alumni."

Mitchell advises current students to take advantage of student

internships, summer jobs and studying at other universities through exchange programs. He said very few people end up working in the field of their major, and it will benefit graduates to get work experience, even if it's not in the field that they later find themselves wanting to pursue.

"And become an active member of your alumni association," Mitchell said. "Be a good citizen in your community by volunteering your time."

## Simpsons: 300 strong and still no stale 'D'oh!' nuts in sight

By Charlie McCollum  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

It was on Dec. 17, 1989, that "The Simpsons" first slipped onto the Fox schedule as a half-hour comedy.

Based on animated vignettes creator Matt Groening did for Tracey Ullman's variety show, Homer, Marge and the kids weren't expected to take up residence for very long. The first episodes were criticized for being loud and crude. No cartoon series had succeeded in prime time since "The Flintstones" in the early 1960s.

On Feb. 16, "The Simpsons," now in its 14th season; aired its 300th episode. Recently renewed for two more years, it is guaranteed to become the longest-running sitcom in TV history, surpassing "Ozzie & Harriet."

And where many comedies wear out after only a few years, "The Simpsons" has retained its edgy wit and its wickedly funny view of American life and pop culture. A number of years ago, Marge Simpson said in an episode that "it's good for a show to go off the air before it gets stale and repetitive."

Here are the reasons "The Simpsons" hasn't-and may never-reach that point:

### THE VOICES

The show has one of best, and certainly the most

versatile, voice casts in the history of animation.

Six key actors -Danny Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, Nancy Cartwright, Yeardley Smith, Hank Azaria and Harry Shearer do the speaking for 44 of the more than 60 characters that regularly appear on the series. Castellaneta alone does, among others, Homer, Krusty the Clown, Mayor Quimby and Itchy of Itchy and Scratchy.

And the actors do more than just read the words. They help to shape the characters. Listen to Castellaneta describe the genesis of Homer's signature phrase, "D'oh": "It's always written as 'annoyed grunt' in the script and the first time I saw it, I said to Matt Groening, 'What's an annoyed grunt?' And he said, 'I don't know, whatever you want.'"

"So I just went back to the old Laurel and Hardy shorts I used to watch and there was an actor named Jim Finlayson who used to always go, 'D'ooooohh!' And so I went, 'D'oooh!' And Matt said, 'Well, this is animation, you've got to go faster.'"

And so, sped-up, it's 'D'oh!'

### THE WRITING

Looking back at 300 episodes, you'll discover the writers on "The Simpsons" have accomplished a neat trick:

Continued on page 7

# A few screws loose – opera hits sour notes

By Michael Johnson  
Whalesong Staff

Okay, so I'm no opera expert, certainly no more qualified to criticize than the next theater buff. But after attending Opera to GO!'s *Turn of the Screw* at the Juneau Elks Hall, I feel a journalistic obligation to inform UAS that it was, in my opinion, no good.

But first, what was pleasant about the performance. The premier I attended was fantastically priced (free). Can't say I didn't get my money's worth. The stage setup was impressive: there was little room to work with, but the props perfectly complimented the limited space. The governess' singing was fabulous, as was the male ghost's. The orchestra did a fine job, too, but the acoustics of the Bingo-hallish room took a heavy toll on ultimate sound quality. In truth, the entire

production progressed smoothly, particularly for the first performance.

I am reluctant to give away plot details, (partly because I don't want to ruin the story, partly because I don't want to bore you to death), but someone dies at the end. The death is disappointingly un-tragic because the character who died sang flat throughout.

I encourage everyone to attend this production who is a lover of the arts, bored with 15 bucks to burn on a ticket, or have never before attended an opera. Truly, operas offer a unique experience and are enjoyable, if nothing else, simply for the spectacle. And so what if *Turn of the Screw* has a few screws loose; it is a reflection of us, it is the exquisite product of a phenomenally obscure town.

## Matrix continued from page 5

between all of this chaos with the 'Edster' there were sporadic bouts of fun with Robert. Don't get excited, he is from the Petri dish also.

I met Robert at the Governor's Inaugural Ball and things went wonderful. You know that Geico commercial where the woman is spinning the lizard around and they're riding the bike together? Yeah, that was us. And there was no horizontal mambo to complicate things and mess the whole thing up. Of Course his Royal Eddieness was not kosher with this because after all, wasn't I supposed to have the candles lit, some Barry White playing and be draped in my silk chemise just in case he called? Since Edward obviously does not live in the Matrix, I chose to take things as far as they could go with Robert. Unfortunately, I hit the love glass ceiling way too early for my taste.

You see, Robert leaves in less than a month to go on an exchange and, I don't know, I must have been sleeping or something, but before I knew it, our relationship had been labeled and all of a sudden I was having his love child and he saw us 15 years from now shuffling around each other and not having nearly as much fun as we are now. So he decided to cut off fun. The whistle blew, Dixie had peed in the pool, so everybody out. I ruined the fun for everyone, so we had to get out. No more splashing and canon balls. Fun's over.

Robert called less, hung out less and just plain old tried to be my friend less. What can I say, more heartache for me. Just this past week-end, Robert celebrated his birthday and did he include me? No. I saw him walk by Pel'Meni's with a group of people that he doesn't even like. God forbid he should spend time with me and begin to care! What's really discouraging is that, before this birthday fiasco, I poured my heart out, and told him how I felt. He reciprocated too, telling me that he had become distant because he's leaving soon and he knows how easily he gets attached, and he didn't want to be in another continent and missing me too much. Well, once again I order something and they serve me up a plate full of crap. You can't abstain from having feelings for someone. Not calling or avoiding them is not going to override what's in your heart. I never said, "Let's get married."

I just meant, "Can't two people who care about each other as friends just hang out?"

I don't get why people feel that it's okay to gut my emotions like a fish. I have decided not to work at salvaging anything with Eddie. He is a juvenile with too much AA potential. As for Robert, his whole speech - about us hanging out because he thinks I'm really cool, but not being intimate in any way - was like fireworks. It looks really good when you first see it, and you are so awestruck. Then it fades and all you have is emptiness where something was once very beautiful.

I'm going on a hike this Sunday with a spry young intellect named Phillip. I'm not expecting anything. I just want to see the nature of Juneau and he was the first guy willing to get up off his I-only-bathe-every-few-days ass and take me. Who knows, he could be the white knight in disguise, but once again, you'll just have to wait and see.

## Simpsons continued from page 6

Case in point: "Homer Badman," a November 1994 episode that sends up tabloid television before it ANYTHING GOES

"We go after everyone," says Yeardley Smith, the voice of Lisa Simpson. "Nobody's safe."

Over the years, "The Simpsons" have taken on corporate greed, the excesses of local television, gun culture, feminism, gay and lesbian issues, sex, environmental themes, the commercialization of rock 'n' roll.

And since it exists in toon world, the show seems to be able to get away with far more than a live-action comedy could. It's hard to imagine any show with real people doing an episode like the recent one in which Marge gets her breasts enlarged and turns all the men in town into drooling morons.

### THE CAST

The core characters -Homer, Marge, Lisa, Bart, Maggie - are great. But "The Simpsons" cast has now expanded to more than 60 residents or sometime-residents of Springfield. That includes such memorable characters as Mr. Burns, the ultimate capitalist who runs the local nuclear power plant; Moe, the scheming and scamming bar owner; Kent Brockman, the unctuous local TV anchor; and the immortal Krusty the Clown,



By Joshua Edward

Uneducated, unsophisticated, uncultured? Get rid of those nasty prefixes in one fell swoop by attending Theatre in the Rough's *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*. Playing Thursdays thru Saturdays, February 27-March 2, 8 p.m. at McPhetres Hall. Tickets available at the door or at Hearthside Books. Saturday, March 1 offers Juneauites the opportunity to see the classic Rock Hudson Doris Day sex-farce *Pillow Talk* on the big, no, make that medium, screen. Showing at the Backroom cinema at the Silverbow Inn downtown, it promises vintage 50s tongue-in-cheek-innuendo-laden fun. Call for details.

Former downtown gastronomical standard *BaCars* returns to fill the glaring vacancy they left when owners Barry and Carlene left to cook for the "fast ferry" between Ketchikan and Prince of Wales Island. Finally Juneau residents will once again be able to get a great breakfast downtown! Located in the former "Café Myriad" at 228 Seward Street, the food will be worth waiting for, if their former incarnation is any indication.

Since we're all adults, I feel no compunction recommending the *Eros and Art* exhibition at the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council gallery downtown. If you can't look at tasteful nudes without snickering, this probably isn't the place for you. The exhibit will be on the walls through Thursday, February 28. Our own SAC offers *Beginning and Advanced Climbing Orientation* for anyone interested in learning the ropes (hee hee). Sessions are February 26 and 27 from 1:30-3 p.m.. That's about it for hip events in ol' Juneau town this week kids. If it's sunny, go for a walk on the beach, if it's snowy build a snowman, if it's rainy, sit and pout...

the nightmare of kids' TV.

### THE OPENING

Each week, "The Simpsons" slightly changes its opening sequence, often to hilarious effect. The changes are usually made to the opening bit (Bart at the blackboard doing penance) and to the closing bit (the family all jumps onto the couch to watch TV.) One classic blackboard line: "A burp in a jar is not a science project."

### AND FINALLY...HOMER

D'oh!

Homer is the Everyman of his generation. He can be the dullest tool in the box. He's always coming up with some scheme. He gets punished by God. He has his excesses. (Bring on that Duff beer!) But in the end, he loves his wife, he loves his kids and almost invariably does the right thing.

Woo-hoo!



# Student Spotlight: 'Few clothes Johnson' (a.k.a. Johnse Ostman)

By Kaci Hamilton  
Whalesong contributor

Do you think you could be on your way to graduating with a B.S. in Environmental Science and a Math minor, play two instruments in two bands, snowboard when there is snow, do the fieldwork, research and write the follow-up 30-page paper for your classes, work as a commercial fisherman in the summer, and still have the energy to be patient and nice to me when I show up talking about interviewing you for the Whalesong?

Well, somebody has to do it and his name is Johnse Ostman. Johnse is one of those guys that you don't see coming; aside from being a super talented musician (he plays in the Panhandle Crabgrass Revival Band and Reubens) and a second Bill Nye the Science Guy, he's a very easy-going, yet extraordinary person. Take his name for example. His parents went to see a play about the Hatfield/McCoy feud and when they heard the alias used for the characters 'Few Clothes Johnson,' they invented a spelling and named their first of two sons. He's never met another 'Johnse', and he probably never will, for he's truly one of a kind.

After leaving his home town in the New Jersey Pennsylvania area 12 years ago, he landed in a little fishing village with a population of 20 (and you thought Juneau was small) called Elfin Cove in exchange for food. There, he worked trolling, crab-

bing and longlining for about 8 years, and enjoying the comfort of living in a place named Hobbitt Hole. He still does some crabbing in the summer, mostly

class, a Hydrology Technician for the Forestry Sciences Lab, a GIS Intern for the ADEC-Cruise Ship Wastewater Discharge Program and a Math Tutor and T.A. The future has a lot of promise for this guy. He still isn't quite sure what he wants to do with his degree, though. "Maybe a Groundwater Hydrologist," he says. According to Johnse, it's a rapidly changing and evolving field that requires a lot of research. Maybe he'll go into it. Maybe he won't.

Getting back to those gargantuan research papers, they aren't all work and no play. An average field trip involves taking the tram up to Mt. Roberts (even though it's closed) and digging a huge snow pit and collecting data. Of course when you're on a mountain on a beautiful day in Juneau, you aren't going to be slaving the whole time. His classmates make sure to through in some ramp building and snow-shovel sliding in the process. Don't ask! You had to have been there. One of his most memorable research projects dealt with observing the seasonal advancement of a retreating glacier, a project that had never been done before. So not only is he a nice guy,

but he's also innovative!

When he's not too busy being brilliant and serious, Johnse is just as crazy as the rest of us Alaskan drifters. We are all looking for that great adventure and the amazing story to tell our kids and at 30 years old, Johnse already has it. He's survived being tossed around solo like a plastic toy by 25ft waves on the open seas and going through the spin cycle of nature's washing machine. Amid all this danger, he managed to squeeze in some time for golf; on the frozen Bering Sea, that is.

Just like anyone else, Johnse has his dreams. One day, you may just be reading about him in the Empire as that year's winner of the Iditarod. But in the meantime, he's just going to continue to do his thing: a little banjo and guitar playing with his bands, some snowboarding when there *is* snow, a little trolling in the summer, some more research papers, and being a nice guy.



Photo courtesy of Johnse Ostman

Music maker Johnse (right) hard at play with his band fiddler Captain Ferg. Johnse and the Panhandle Crabgrass Revival Band were on tour in Slime Creek, just north of Denali.

revisiting some of his favorite spots between Juneau and Sitka. In addition to holding the scientifically-proven most dangerous job in the world, Johnse has worked as a shipwright, a T.A. for the Geology 104

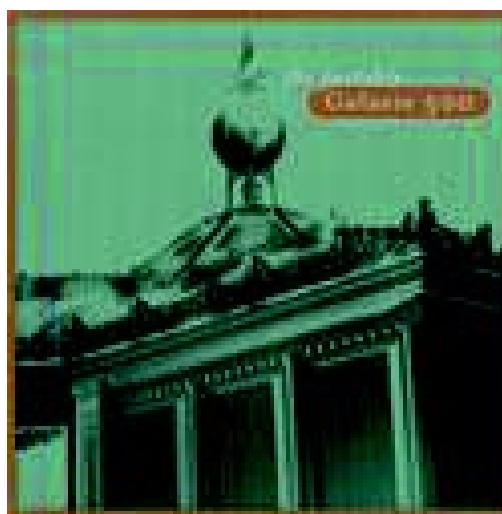
## The Best Album You've Never Heard...

By Joshua Edward  
Whalesong Staff

Review: *The Portable Galaxie 500*, Galaxie 500, 1998  
Rykodisc

For the uninitiated, a quick recap: three friends meet in highschool in New York. All subsequently attend Harvard University, where they form Galaxie 500, in 1986. The group releases three albums before calling it quits in the early 90s. By now you may find yourself asking: why a review of an album released in 1998 that compiles material from the 80s and 90s? In my defense, I did title this lil' column "the best album you've never heard," and I never promised anyone that all my reviews would be of brand new material. Got it? Now back to the music...

Galaxie 500 is, quite possibly, the best band you've never heard. They were, to put it mildly, *sublime*. They were also incredibly overlooked. While other Massachussets college bands made radio waves in the early 90s (Pixies, Dinosaur Jr.), Galaxie 500 had to look to Europe for recognition; in fact, most listeners in the states were never even aware of their existence until well after the band members parted ways. It wasn't until the late 90s that the Galaxie crew started to get their proverbial props as one of the most influential bands in the emergence of "alternative music" (like "world peace," "budget surplus," and other Clinton-era catchphrases, "alternative music" now sounds both dated and wonderfully naive...). With the recent



emergence of "new-old-new-wave" soundalikes like Interpol, Galaxie 500 are once again popping up as the little college band everybody emulates.

The sounds speak for themselves: at once cacophonous and elegiac, *The Portable Galaxie 500* is one of the most timeless albums ever, as relevant today as any of the myriad of new releases trotted out each week.

**Why You Should Buy This Album:** Sounds like these never go out of style.

**Standout Tracks:** Snowstorm, Tugboat

**Sounds Like the Illegitimate Lovechild of:** The Velvet Underground, Joy Division



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